THE WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL IN CAPTIVITY.

BY JAMES HAYNES HILL.

THE ornithologists of Connecticut will long remember the winter of 1899–1900, that brought to them the rare avian visitors from the North, the Red Crossbills and, rarer still, the White-winged Crossbills (*Loxia leucoptera*).

While many of the Red Crossbills extended their wanderings as far south as Washington, the White-wings were content to abide in the old Nutmeg State, and were frequently reported, feeding and otherwise, in company with the Red Crossbills, staying as late as February 27, according to Mr. H. W. Beers's field notes taken at Bridgeport (and to whom I am greatly indebted for the use of the fine series of Crossbills loaned me for comparison and examination), and later still, to March 1, at which date the captives, the subject of my sketch, were taken.

It was a few days after their capture that a lady friend, Mrs. Albert Beebe, of New London, Conn., sent word that she had a pair of strange, red colored, wild birds, with criss-cross bills and white patches on the wings. They were indeed the *rara avis*, the White-winged Crossbill and in perfect plumage — male and female birds.

Upon inquiry I learned that several had been easily enticed into a bird cage, baited with bird seed, this pair selected, and the others liberated. She also said at least fifteen or twenty birds (some without the white-wing patches, evidently the Red Crossbills), were often seen, during the winter, feeding on the spruce and Scotch larch cones in the groves, growing in the vicinity, that they had become quite tame, but were not seen after March 1.

The captives were quite tame, in fact tamer than some of her pet canaries, and they were daily allowed their liberty and would fly about the room, the male at times singing his queer little song. They are now very fond of their mistress, who has taken great pains to make their captivity as light as possible.

They bathe, drink, and are fed on the same food as the canaries, and take kindly to the little dainties provided — chickweed and bits of fruit or vegetables, and I write with truth that "Mi-lord"

Crossbill is always ungallant and "wants the first serving and the second joint."

They can pick up bird seed as deftly as any canary, though if the seed is on the bottom of the cage, they turn their heads a little on one side, seemingly to give their bills a better chance, but if the seed cup is full they have no trouble and always get their full share, being quicker than the other birds in their movements. But it is when a handful of larch or pine cones are given them that the crossed mandibles come into play; if the cones are small they fly to their perches with them, and holding them under their feet deftly extract the seeds. Should the cones be too large, they will roll them over and over until every seed is extracted, cheeping the while; if the cones are left on the branch they will hang head downward, if need be, in order that they may the more easily get at the seeds, of which they are very fond.

I was particularly interested in noting closely the moulting of the birds — especially the male — to again verify, if possible, the observations of Mr. Ora W. Knight of Bangor, Maine, who has so minutely described the moult of the Pine Grosbeak in captivity, in 'The Auk' (Vol. XIII, p. 21–24), viz.: "the red plumage changing to orange yellow — at the first moult."

Observations on the Crossbills show that in the last week of August the male ceases singing, and by the middle of September he has lost most of his large flight feathers, which are replaced by the first week of November; then the smaller body feathers are gradually replaced by orange hued feathers, slightly marked with dusky on the head and body, the rump being bright canary instead of the rich, rosy red hues that adorn them in their wild state; thus showing that not only the Pine Grosbeak but the White-winged Crossbill also loses the characteristic bright colors in the first moult in captivity, rose turning to orange yellow. The bills and feet are also light colored, viz.: the olive green in the female is less pronounced. By December the moult is complete, but the male bird does not find voice till January to sing his low, sweet song, so much resembling the Goldfinch's, and with which our pet Crossbill ushers in the day and repeats at intervals.

These birds at this writing (Nov. 11, 1901) are in perfect health, and the only annoyance is that the bill and feet grow so hooked

that they have to be trimmed to avoid accidental hanging while climbing the wires of their cage, like diminutive parrots.

The mysteries of nest building, housekeeping and the cares of nidification, are mysteries still. In the spring of 1900 the birds showed no signs of mating, and it was ascribed to their new surroundings. But during the last week of February, 1901, the female wished to go to housekeeping and materials were given them, fine twigs, fine birch bark and a little Usnea moss. But the male bird treated his mate with disdain, quarreling with her and driving her from perch to perch. Whether he resented the matchmaking because it was 'Hobson's choice,' or remembered the soft, sweet voice of the former partner of his joys and sorrows, the only "Mrs. Leucoptera" whom he had sworn to love and cherish till death part, and was loyal, I know not. Perhaps it was in grief, a memory of the blissful days in that far off northern home, among "The murmuring pines and the hemlocks, bearded with moss." Perhaps his tale of love was ended, "in Acadie, home of the happy."

SUMMER BIRDS OF THE GREAT DISMAL SWAMP.

BY JOHN W. DANIEL, JR.

DURING the middle of June, 1897, the writer, in company with Mr. William Palmer and Mr. Paul Bartsch, spent a week collecting birds in the Lake Drummond region of the Great Dismal Swamp. As is well known, this great morass occupies a billowy plain, some forty miles long by twenty-five miles across, extending from Suffolk, Va., to Albemarle Sound, N. C. Its entire western boundary is determined by a sharply defined escarpment, formed by the sea when the continent was about twenty-eight feet below its present level.

Its eastern boundary is marked by a series of low elevations, dune-like in nature, extending from Norfolk, Va., to Elizabeth City, N. C. The character of the swamp land is continuously undulating, the elevations rising and falling at slight intervals.